



Protecting Youth Athletes on Campus:

Evaluation of the University’s Training on Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

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INTRODUCTION

Recent national headlines have increased the awareness and concern for youth safety in camps on college campuses¹. In response, universities across the country have begun exploring what their responsibility is for the safety and well-being of youth that interact with staff at their college campuses^{2,3}. In 2012, the OSU Department of Athletics and College of Social Work partnered to develop trainings for staff interacting with youth athletes at the Buckeye Sports Camp (BSC)⁴.

Annually, BSC provides 140 summer camps to 140,000 youth on campus with 1,350 staff employees⁵. “Protecting Youth at BSC” was created to enhance staff’s knowledge of the child abuse and neglect, dictate appropriate reporting procedures within the university, and determine staff’s willingness to report suspicion of child abuse and/or neglect⁴.

METHODS

Intervention
The main component of “Protecting Youth at BSC” was a training presented by College of Social Work faculty and staff. Key topics were the 1) definition and signs of abuse, 2) responsibility of staff in preventing and reporting abuse, and 3) process for reporting suspected abuse to designated HR personnel. Camp staff received a handout to keep as a resource.

Sampling
A retrospective online survey was provided to staff who participated in the training. Of the 707 staff contacted, 7 did not have valid email addresses. 271 responded to the survey to allow for a 39% response rate (n=271).

Statistical Analysis
Categorical and descriptive statistics were computed for quantitative data using SPSS 19.0.

METHODS

Study Demographics
The majority of respondents were male (74.3%), college-aged (36.9%), and identified as working as a coach at camp (58.7%). Other camp roles included administrative (10%), support staff (12.5%), counselor (14.8%), athletic trainer (1.2%), and First Aid provider (1.6%).

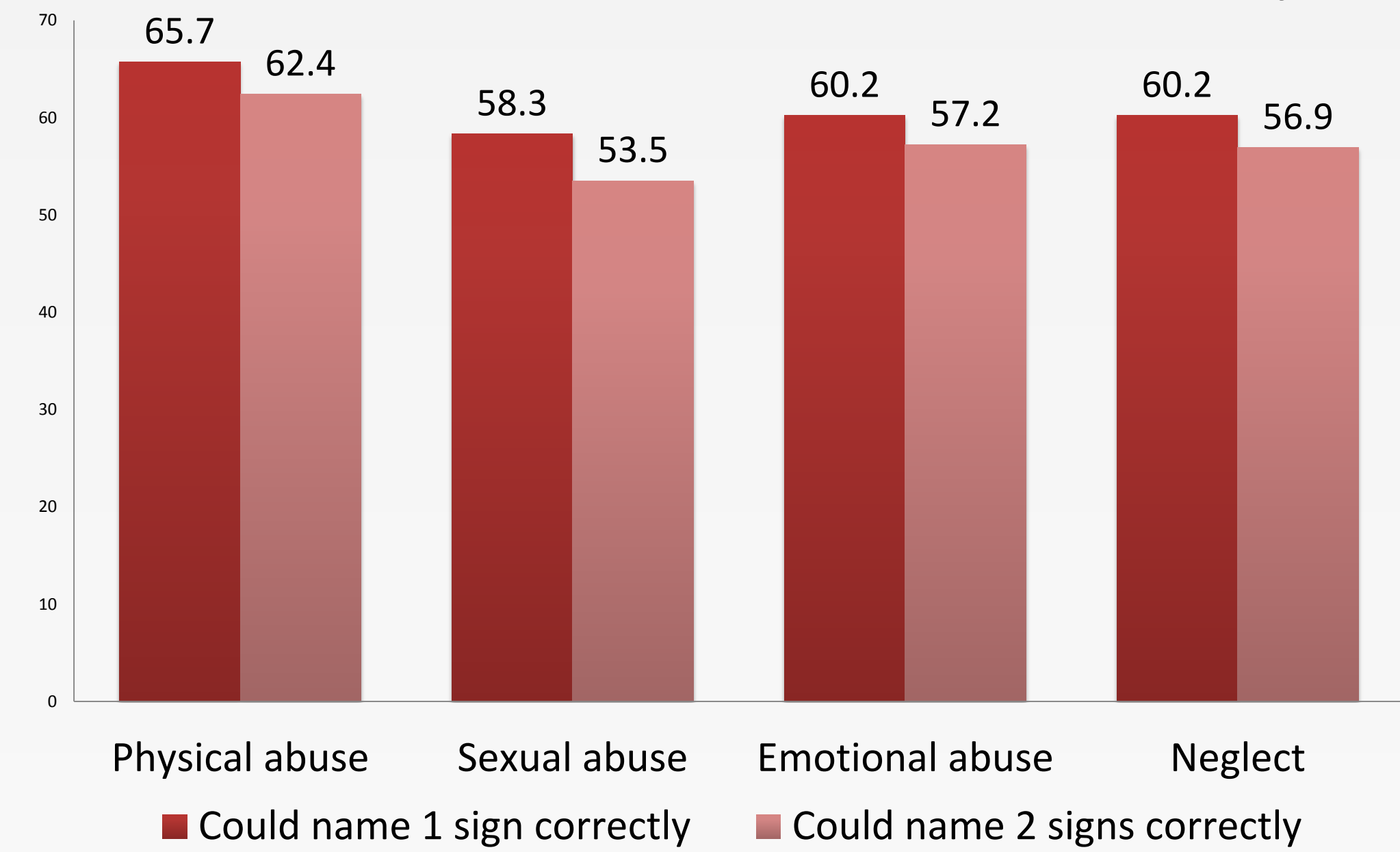
For the majority of respondents this was their first time through the training (57.9%), but they had been in their camp role for 2-5 years (35.5%). Of respondents, 12.1% indicated they had reported child abuse/neglect previously to attending the training.

Of respondents, 13.7% identified as a current OSU student, and of those 8.1% identified themselves as a student athlete.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked to name two of the following signs

- Physical abuse: 178 (65.7%) could name one sign, and 169 (62.4%) could name two correctly.
- Sexual abuse: 158 (58.3%) could name one sign, and 145 (53.5%) could name two correctly.
- Emotional abuse: 165 (60.2%) could name one sign, and 155 (57.2%) could name two correctly.
- Neglect: 165 (60.2%) could name one sign, and 154 (56.9%) could name two correctly.



RESULTS

As a result of the “Protecting Youth a Buckeye Sports Camp” Training...

- 97.8% agreed that the training provided them an understanding of their role as a camp staff member in reporting suspicion of child abuse and/or neglect.
- 94.4% agreed that they became more aware of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect as a result of the training.
- 98.1% were in agreement of the importance of ensuring that all camp staff is trained in child abuse reporting procedures.
- 95.1% agreed as a result of the training, they were better able to identify the signs and symptoms of child abuse and/or neglect.
- 94% agreed that as a result of the training they were more likely to report suspicion of child abuse and/or neglect to authorities or child services.
- Of respondents, 182 (67.2%) were able to identify who to contact at OSU if they suspected camper was the victim of child abuse.

96.8% agreed that if there was a suspicion of child abuse or neglect for a Buckeye Sports youth, they would report it to the designated OSU contact.

DISCUSSION

Unfortunately, the failure to follow through with the intention to report often only comes to light after serious problems. Future research should explore what model(s) best translates knowledge and intention into action. Additionally, exploring attitudes and awareness held by staff prior to trainings in order to identify changes from pre to post could benefit university athletic programs. Furthermore, different roles at camp may benefit from role-specific trainings⁶.

Study limitations included that it was retrospective and lacked diversity in study participants.

DISCUSSION

Implications:
The goal of trainings such as this is to equip and empower staff to protect campers. As demonstrated by the results, participants recognize the importance of such trainings and procedures. While the six-month recall of signs of abuse and neglect was encouraging, not all who would report suspicions could identify a sign for each. Annual refreshers and easy access to online resources may narrow this gap for individuals.

Rather than having a designated individual within human resources be responsible for reporting suspected cases of youth abuse/neglect, The Ohio State University now asks that individuals themselves report their suspicions directly to child protective services. In subsequent iterations of previous protocol, it will be interesting to assess what impact this change in institutional structure has on the willingness to report.

The results of this study reinforce the value of adopting similar safety trainings and protocols within other universities and agencies running summer programming for youth.

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